

MAGONIA *Monthly Supplement*

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Interpreting contemporary vision and belief -----

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EDITORIAL

Ufologists who support the ETH can easily find cases which appear to point to it as a possible explanation, but the main weakness of such cases is that the testimony never seems to be confirmed by independent witnesses. Where there are said to be such witnesses, their testimony remains mysteriously unavailable, as in a number of incidents I have discussed in previous issues. If there really are well-witnessed, inexplicable UFO incidents, there can't be many of them. Perhaps someone would like to furnish us with a list of them?

LATEST BUFORA BUST-UP

The recent crisis in BUFORA, involving the resignations of key members, highlights one of the perennial problems of ufology - the tension between the majority, who believe in the flying saucers and see UFO organisations as having a duty to entertain them and to reinforce their beliefs, and the minority who prefer to carry out objective investigations of apparent UFO incidents with a view to discovering the truth about them.

This latest bust-up has prompted me to have a root through back issues of *Magonia* and its predecessors, *MUFOB* and *Merseyside UFO Bulletin*. There are many items concerning the fights and feuds in British ufology and they nearly all have the same cause. It is simply that there always have been intelligent and sensible people interested in UFO reports who fail to realise that formal UFO organisations exist for the benefit of those who believe in the flying saucers. When such UFO organisations get hold of an interesting case, they invent details to spice it up, then present it in various forms to entertain their fellow believers. Objective investigations and rational explanations are definitely unwelcome. Pseudoscience is preferred to science, as science is too difficult and its application is all too likely to lead to true explanations, which can be very boring, and can undermine the faith of those who attend daft lectures and buy gee-whiz books.

There is nothing new about the turmoil in BUFORA and there is nothing new about Malcolm Robinson's policy of including cranks, publicity seekers and the mentally unbalanced in his lecture programme. What is unusual, though, is that there are increasing numbers of UFO researchers who are no longer prepared to tolerate the activities of such people. In the old days one could attend a UFO conference and see sceptics, objective researchers and cranks happily sharing the same platform. The cranks got all the applause, of course.

Now some of the saner ufologists have decided that enough is enough. But, one wonders: Why did they ever even contemplate joining BUFORA in the first place? BUFORA has always had among its members many eccentric and gullible people, pseudoscientists with fake PhDs, 'Captains' who never went to sea, and other oddities. Yet some people persist in believing that organisations like BUFORA can be reformed if only a few sane people join them. In his resignation letter, BUFORA Press Officer Dr David Clarke wrote: 'As a working journalist of ten years I felt I could be a great asset for the association, and was initially under the impression that my experience and skills would be valued by council. I anticipated working closely with council members to promote BUFORA as the premier national UFO study group, committed to high standards and setting a responsible example to other groups, individuals and the outside world.'

Magonia's predecessor, *Merseyside UFO Bulletin*, was started because I and a few others found BUFORA and its affiliates to be insufferable. And that was way back in 1968. The *Bulletin*

followed on from *MUFORG Bulletin*, which I had started as a member of that group (which was affiliated to BUFORA) in 1966. Sceptical and sensible members of the group contributed interesting items to *MUFORG Bulletin*; the believers and head-bangers contributed nothing, but complained loudly about its content. They apparently wanted vaguely uplifting stories about blond-haired Venusians, together with the occasional technical piece about anti-gravity drives for flying saucers. The rows that resulted when the believers did not get what they wanted could be amusing, though. In 1971, I wrote, concerning MUFORG and *MUFORG Bulletin*:

Towards the end of 1966 we got even more controversial. In September I went to the BUFORA Northern Conference in Bradford and heard Mr Arthur Shuttlewood holding forth for two solid hours about the Warminster phenomena. My scathing review of this event, in the October 1966 issue of the *Bulletin*, brought two indignant letters in support of Shuttlewood for publication in the December issue.

However, in that December issue we really excelled ourselves. Alan Sharp wrote a lyrical piece, 'Moonlight at Warminster', which practically suggested that observers there were victims of their own overwrought imaginations. We also published reviews of the BUFORA Annual General Meeting, written by Dave Hughes and Paul Hopkins. Both reviews were highly critical, with plenty of sarcastic comments. I must admit, though, that Hopkins puzzled me at the time by complaining in his write-up that he had to pay 3/- [3 shillings = 15 pence!] for 'temporary membership' in order to be admitted. I had also attended the meeting, but I just walked straight into the hall, assuming that the people clustered around the table were merely intent on buying the UFO books and magazines inevitably offered for sale at such events!

These reviews resulted in some 'more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger' letters from BUFORA officials [they didn't just ignore their critics in those days] and a great shouting match at the January 1967 MUFORG meeting, which sought to establish whether or not the contents in the December issue were justified. The shouting died down after about half an hour and the result was generally agreed to be a draw. (1)

When I left MUFORG nobody took on the task of editor and the group gradually disintegrated as its sane members found better things to do with their spare time.

In 1970, John Rimmer wrote:

Then there's the BUFORA in-group. Very interesting this one. It should be required study for organisational psychologists. The plots and counter-plots are Machiavellian. I find them fascinating, but I am the sort of sadist who finds self-destruction fascinating. . . . Yet the BUFORA people are all honourable men, why do they behave in this way? Chiefly, I think, because they have run out of ideas. Because they are sterile, devoid of any new ideas, incapable of adjusting a way of thinking. This leads to pomposity, a deep, self-assured feeling that any criticism is the work of an inferior intellect. . . .

Face it! The average ufologist wants to go to a group and hear someone telling him about the space people. If he's over twenty-five he wants to hear about the nice space people. If he's under twenty-five he wants to hear about the nasty space people. The last thing he wants to do is study and investigate, or pay out any of his easy earned money so that others can. Even the investigation is limited. If you accept, as most do, that the UFOs are space craft there is little you can do except panic and wait for them to announce themselves. And most people are doing this very well indeed. (2)

This article was 'noted with some dismay' by Richard Beet of the Surrey Investigation Group on Aerial Phenomena in the next issue (Vol. 3, No. 4) of *Merseyside UFO Bulletin*, and he went on to emphasise the need for organised groups. However, in ufology, organised groups just do not work; they serve largely to entertain believers and to spread disinformation about common misperceptions and unusual phenomena. I believe that one of the main mistakes made by those UFO organisations who start with the intention to be objective is in allowing anyone to join, instead of operating a strict, even if informal, selection procedure. Such groups would be small, but would surely be more effective and more respected. There are not many sensible and intelligent folk who take a healthily sceptical interest in UFOs. As Peter Brookesmith put it, it is 'dark and lonely work, but someone has to do it'. (3)

References

1. Harney, John. 'A Personal View of the Sixties', *Merseyside UFO Bulletin*, 2, 6, November-December 1969
2. Rimmer, John. 'The Death and Life of British Ufology', *Merseyside UFO Bulletin*, 3, 3, June-July 1970
3. Brookesmith, Peter. 'Dark and Lonely Work', *Magonia*, 52, May 1995

BOOK REVIEWS

David M. Jacobs. *The Threat*, Simon & Schuster, 1998. £16.99, \$23.00

This book has so far generated some derision, but little comment.

Jacobs, a professor of history at Temple University in Philadelphia, has been researching UFOs since 1966, but is not a man to rush to conclusions. His 1975 book *The UFO Controversy in America* was a proper academic study which tried to sit on the fence, though it showed signs of falling off on the ETH side. By the late 1970s he 'could no longer deny that witnesses were seeing something extraordinary and probably not from Earth'. In 1986 he performed his first hypnotic regression. Since then he has regressed over a hundred abductees, and in recent years he has come to believe he has thereby 'uncovered information that allows UFO researchers to solve the UFO mystery'.

We have heard this claim many times before. Unfortunately, all of the definitive solutions to the UFO mystery have been different, and mostly mutually incompatible.

Jacobs believes that aliens are unable to reproduce themselves properly, so they are abducting our women and forcing them into a breeding programme intended to create human-alien hybrids who will eventually take over the world. Huge numbers of busy aliens must be engaged therein: he estimates that more than a million Americans have been abducted, perhaps as many as five million, sometimes regularly: one woman 'had as many as 100 abductions during a one-year period' (and to her distress her family and friends refused to believe her). Their genetic science is so advanced that they can even use women who are postmenopausal or who have had hysterectomies. Some hybrids are already sufficiently like us that they can mingle with humans unnoticed for up to a few hours. As students of urban legend will have guessed, while on Earth they like to travel about in unmarked vans and black helicopters. Even if the world's scientists wake up to *The Threat*, they may be too late to prevent it, since 'The Change' (when 'they' will start to rule openly, apparently) is coming in not more than two generations, perhaps in as little as five years.

The trouble is that this is one of those theories that, if true, should never have got into print. The ruthless aliens are supposed to have already reached the stage where they can do what they like with us, and since they monitor abductees closely (through their implants, he suggests) they must know that he has learnt their secrets: surely then they would have silenced him (or did they allow him to publish as a double bluff?). Yet Jacobs is obviously completely sincere, and so probably are his abductees. If one is to dismiss his findings, then it is worth asking how come he has apparently obtained a consistent body of evidence for something that is not real?

Firstly, at least some of these cases seem to have begun with a genuinely inexplicable event. One woman wrote to him: 'In 1979 my boyfriend and I saw a UFO close up and it swooped down low towards us. All I remember was running, and then we found ourselves in our car and it was six hours later. I have thought about this incident every day of my life since then.' Unfortunately he does not tell us anything more about this woman, though one may suppose that he hypnotised her and got her to recall her abduction.

If so, he would have been making a crucial assumption. When dealing with the unknown, one ought to consider every possibility. Reports of 'missing time' might, for instance, be caused by people going into trances for some reason. If so, then it would be futile to regress them, since there would be nothing lost for them to recall.

In most instances, however, the evidence that the subject might have been abducted is pretty vague, e.g. a woman who sat in on his university course 'UFOs and American Society' started to feel so uncomfortable that she had to stop attending. Later they concluded that she had been abducted 13 times in 1994 alone.

In another case, a graduate student could recall having been molested by a stranger at the age of twelve. Under hypnotic regression, however, the incident turned out to have been a screen memory for 'a routine abduction event'. This anecdote raises all kinds of possibilities that Jacobs doesn't explore, not least that alien abductions might be screen memories for ordinary sexual abuse.

Though he says he is careful not to ask leading questions, it is hard to believe that he does not put his own interpretation on events. He states that aliens purposely place 'instilled memories' in the abductee's mind: 'I have had people remember figures that looked like Abraham Lincoln wearing a stovepipe hat, men wearing fedoras, angels, devils, and so forth.' A hypnotist with a different agenda might regard the angels or devils as real, but the aliens as 'instilled memories'. One woman recalled being assaulted and raped, a candle pushed into her vagina, and seeing a vision of people being hacked to death in a graveyard. This could have been taken as a classic example of Satanic Abuse, but here it is interpreted as caused by hybrids intimidating her so that she would co-operate with them.

Then again, some other abductionists believe that the US military is secretly working with the aliens. Not so, says Jacobs: some hybrids wear one-piece jump suits that resemble uniforms so 'it is easy to mistake them for American military personnel'. One gathers that he has to set his abductees straight on this point.

What is the proof for all this? Attempts have been made to video abductees at night. 'So far, no abductions have been videotaped. Rather, tapes reveal people getting up and inexplicably turning off the VCR, or unusual power outages during which the camera turns off, or the camera simply goes off mysteriously.' Jacobs is also well aware that false memory and confabulations are common, and devotes a chapter to this difficulty.

Apparently he judges the stories by their similarity. Melissa, the very first woman he regressed, described how she touched an alien's head and 'immediately felt, love, warmth, and affection emanating from him'. But she did not recall this on her second regression, and no other abductee has reported having been 'required to touch an alien's head and receive loving emotions'. Therefore he concludes that this was a false memory. It would seem from this that those things he thinks are genuine must be true because more than one abductee reports them. An example is 'Mindscan', reported by several named subjects, where an alien stares at a woman to make her sexually aroused, sometimes to the point of intense orgasm. (Does the hypnotist merely make them recall this, or actually re-undergo it?)

One wonders how far the apparent consistency of these stories is actually due to the arrangement of the material. In his comments on the sessions Jacobs frequently uses special terms such as gray, hybrid, The Change, as also in his non-leading questions ('gray beings, or hybrid?'), but they do not occur in the quoted extracts from the subjects. One might even ask whether, if many people had been abducted by aliens, they would necessarily have undergone similar things?

In any case, such consistency is hardly proof of reality. It is well known to Jungian analysts that unconnected people in different parts of the world will have very similar dreams, apparently because everyone's mind works in the same basic way. Hypnotic regression may just be tapping into the same collective unconscious. Then again, Jacobs assumes that you have to select the consistent details out from the admixture with false memories, instilled memories, and other phantasmata. This would only work if there really was a consistent body of evidence to be recovered, if all these subjects had indeed forgotten similar experiences of abduction - which is not independently proven.

I am afraid that if Jacobs is right, then nonetheless the scientific community are not going to take him seriously, so the world as we know it will be doomed.

Gareth J. Medway

Paul Cornell, Martin Day and Keith Topping. *X-Treme Possibilities: A Comprehensively Expanded Rummage Through Five Years of The X-Files*, Virgin, 1998. £6.99

Love it or hate it *The X-Files* will help you identify where the loonies get most of their wacky ideas from. As the authors say in this book, *The X-Files* is the product of a nation that is so betrayed by its leaders that it has come to believe that there is some cosmic conspiracy at work.

As a consequence, the Greys are to blame for the evils and shortcomings of US democracy. They are the all-powerful bureaucrats from outer space:

'The Greys are also the dead of Belsen (an image *The X-Files* takes literally), aborted foetuses, shaved experimental cats: all those things we've done, that we should be guilty about, externalised, mythologised, and back to do to us what we did to them.'

The activities of Special Agents Fox Mulder and Dana Scully have 'progressed' from being earnest variations on popular horror and science fiction films based on tabloid headlines, to self-conscious, tongue-in-cheek storylines.

This book provides an episode-by-episode guide which takes you through all the twists and turns of the plots and how they relate to each other. It is an entertaining and insightful read and

contains many nuggets of intriguing 'facts' from the series. For example, Mulder eats sunflower seeds in several episodes; apparently these have a protective effect against vampires and from other potential biological threats against humanity. I wonder if many parrots are starving due to people imitating him?

For ufologists and explorers of the unknown this is a fine look at the interface between fact and fiction; it's also extremely good value for money. Buy it before they get you.

Nigel Watson

LETTERS

Thanks for the review (15 months late but what the heck) of *UFO Crash Landing? Friend or Foe?* I am puzzled why Nigel Watson seems to appear out of his self-imposed Bermuda Triangle just to review books about Rendlesham. As such we get a curious impression of his apparent bias against this case.

To say that Roswell compared with it is 'sensible to believe in' is ridiculous. There we are trying to evaluate a 52-year-old story via witnesses who nearly all died years ago, seeded with so much modern hype and invention (the autopsy film, bits of alleged Roswell debris, etc., etc.) that there is no hope of getting very far. In so far as we can get, however, Roswell is clearly not a case 'to believe in' for the overwhelming evidence supports the view that this was a downed balloon used in the Mogul experiment. That is certainly how I read the evidence at present and I do not consider Roswell of any huge significance, except from an instructive and socially historical perspective.

In contrast Rendlesham offers a far better prospect. Why? Most of the witnesses are still alive and many are now talking. It is possible to collate what they all say, record what was going on in the area at the time and try from all of that to piece the thing together into some kind of picture that approximates to the truth. That is what I do in this book. To say - as Nigel does yet again without justification - that the book is merely a 'great laugh' and shows (presumably my) 'gullibility' is a little galling given his apparent lack of understanding of this complex case.

For a start, the witness testimony provided - from the likes of Penniston, Halt and Burroughs - is all first-hand direct from them. That escalates this book up a notch, surely? I make abundantly clear why I consider them the most reliable and what problems I have with the comments of both Larry Warren and 'Steve Roberts'. Indeed, at no point does Nigel even indicate that I express grave doubts that Roberts was even involved and am well aware of the 'disinformation' aspect to his story-telling. The innuendo is I fell for his tall tales when I patently did not. His question as to why someone from USAF public affairs should want ufologists to accept tall tales about aliens is answered in the book, by my pointing out that if a more mundane but covert explanation for the events exists then the fostering of alien stories on base (and off via ufology) had a positive effect. It helped to create precisely the climate of sloppy disinterest in what took place that Nigel now so perfectly demonstrates. I do not consider my seeing of this to be gullible. But I do suspect that the powers that be counted on the attitude of British ufology to believe that if a case smells like an alien contact then it ain't to be trusted or to be touched with a ten-foot pole.

As for my presentation of multiple scenarios, Nigel likens these to conclusions as slippery as grease. What he does not say is that my book is written in the following way. First I report all the evidence, via witness testimony, the documents, and the physical evidence, presenting the pros and cons of each (in the process killing some sacred cows like the radiation and marks on trees). Then I go step by step through the investigation process as I have always been taught to do. This means considering one by one the possibilities - from the simplest to the most bizarre. So we look at mistaken identity (lighthouse, etc.) through aircraft activity and more debatable military practices (e.g. the Cold Witness/Cobra Mist experiments) and on to the claims of ufology that the case is an alien contact. Assessing each option, showing in what way it works and in what way it does not reflects not so much me keeping my options open, failing to decide or trying to have it every which way at once. It is merely presenting readers with the facts and all options and doing my job as an investigator to try to pick my way through the possibilities.

I guess Nigel would only have been happy if I had written a book seeking to prove the whole case collapses as a combination of lighthouse/meteor/rabbit IFOs. Alternatively, most of ufology would have been happy (and so would my bank manager!) if I had set out to prove the aliens had landed in a smoky white spaceship. In some ways I do both. But unfortunately, the reality of this case is that the evidence is not cut and dried in any direction. I show why the second night's events are, in my view, more likely to be mistaken identity. I show why the first night's story is more open to other

interpretations. I also do not just magic out of thin air the ideas about Cobra Mist, as if I had simply invented this daft idea about a covert experiment. At no point does Nigel mention the evidence I unravel about the NASA programme to develop an over-the-horizon radar on Orford Ness, the scientific puzzles about the changes to the orbital decay path of a Soviet rocket that night, or the views of space scientists on the matter. I present this option because, and only because, it fits a number of the facts surprisingly well. If indeed a by-product of a defensive weapon was - as I suggest - the accidental discovery of a crude offensive beam weapon, then I am not in the least surprised if this was tested on a night when a rocket was burning up on a flight path over the forest. As I point out in the book, it was the perfect moment to conduct such a test, because anything that did happen would superficially seem indistinguishable from what was supposed to occur anyway. Of course, if airmen then saw the beam in action it would also justify the spinning of yarns about aliens to ensure that the media and ufologists switched off from seeking out the more down-to-earth truth. They would either rubbish the whole case (like Nigel seems to want to do) or go chasing non-existent spaceships instead.

So, no, I don't know what happened and I am still eager to find out one day. What I do know is that the truth is far more complicated than Nigel (or most sceptics) seems to think it was. The case is, in fact, a terrific one because it has so much going on. There is misidentification, distortion, exaggeration and probably confabulation. There are government botch-ups and cover-ups. But at the heart of it there is at least a *prima facie* case for suspecting that the nefarious activities of the NSA on Orford Ness were not unconnected with what took place at the start of this weekend of confusion.

Roswell was, and is, little more than a few bits of crashed foil and wood misidentified at the time, later correctly identified but obscured by the USAF desire not to go public with their experiments of the day. Rendlesham is ufology in microcosm. Almost the entire subject is there in one case. I wish I could honestly say that it was all just a bunch of spaced-out airmen chasing a lighthouse and then fooling themselves for 20 years. Whilst - as I have never shirked from admitting - some of it clearly is, I believe there is rather too much going on in the background to claim game, set and match. Nigel, I fear, made his mind up 15 years ago and I hope he can at least ask himself the question - might I not be wrong? Anyone who has read my articles on this case even since *Friend or Foe?* was published in January 1998 (see *Northern UFO News* and *International UFO Reporter*) will know that I am constantly reviewing my position as new evidence seems to constantly develop. As a UFO investigator, the day you stop letting the evidence dictate what you believe and being willing to change from belief to scepticism (or indeed vice versa) is the day you ought to quit. It always puzzles me why keeping an open mind is regarded in some quarters as a crime worse than making it up prematurely in a way that proves to be dead wrong.

Jenny Randles, Buxton, Derbyshire

Nigel Watson replies: *I am shocked to discover that the Roswell case amounts to 'a few bits of crashed foil and wood misidentified at the time' whereas Rendlesham offers a better chance of getting to the truth.*

Surprisingly, this better, newer and more enlightening case, by Jenny's own admission, is full of 'misidentification, distortion, exaggeration and probably confabulation. There are government botch ups and cover ups'. To me that could equally be applied as a description of the Roswell case; it certainly does not sound like a better route to the truth!

The twists and turns of Rendlesham are of obvious fascination for Jenny. She indicates that some military operations or experiments were being conducted, and that the UFO story has been put about to get rid of closed-minded sceptics like me.

From such a scenario we must conclude that Jenny is acting as a subversive agent who is actively willing to reveal the secrets of our Government, just to satisfy her curiosity for the 'truth'. Where is her social responsibility? Will she accept that she is an urban guerilla who is undermining our political, social, military and economic structure? Isn't that a crime worse than being merely closed-minded?

MAGONIA Monthly Supplement is available on the Magonia web site, with printed copies sent to the favoured few. Letters and short articles welcome. Letters will be considered for publication unless otherwise indicated. Please send all contributions to the Editor: John Harney, 27 Enid Wood House, High Street, Bracknell, Berkshire RG12 1LN UK ☎/Fax: 01344 482709
